Conflict

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Preacher: Andrew Lawrence

[0:00] Okay, well, hi. If you're new with us, my name's Andrew. I'm part of the leadership team! I'm part of the leadership team here of Harvest Church, and it's great to have you with us.

I have the privilege of preaching God's Word to us this morning, and I'd like to encourage you, if you have a Bible with you, to turn to Acts chapter 15, please. We're going to dive straight into the Scriptures, and then we'll go from there. So, Acts chapter 15.
This will be on the screen if you don't have a Bible with you. It's quite a short passage we're going to be looking at today. So, here we go. Some time later, Paul said to Barnabas, let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preach the Word of the Lord and see how they're doing. Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them. But Paul did not think it was wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus. Paul chased Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. This morning, I'd like us to consider a subject which has the power to do a lot of damage if not handled well. And so, I want to pray again. God, help us. Give us the grace we need to hear your voice and even more grace to respond appropriately. In Jesus' name. Amen.
The subject is conflict. Now, I don't know how you respond when you hear that word. For some of us, it will fill us with fear, because we have experienced conflict in our lives, which perhaps wasn't wholesome or healthy. Let's put it that way. That was really unhealthy.
For some of us, we may go, I'd love a good argument. Oh, I'm so glad we're going to get on to this. For some of us, we may have a view where, well, conflict's just wrong.
[2:28] Well, let's see what scriptures have to tell us about this. In starting, I want to tell a little bit of my story. I grew up in a household where mum and dad were very much at peace with each other. And I never saw or experienced any conflict between my parents at all. I don't even remember one argument. We should just go, wow. But actually, I wasn't healthy, because the arguments just happened where the kids weren't. Not that there were lots and lots of arguments, but actually, I didn't have any sort of example of conflict, of healthy conflict.

I had no idea, really, what it looked like. In fact, my upbringing taught me, basically, to avoid it. And avoiding conflict isn't always healthy, as we'll get to see in a moment.
So, if we are to be a people who bring the love of God to the world around us, maybe we also need to be a people who are equipped and empowered to deal with conflict. I want to start with a few foundational questions. My first one is this. What do we mean by conflict?
Because to all of us, we'll have different understandings of what we mean by conflict. It is a subjective thing, to a degree. We'll all have different thresholds as to what is just a discussion or argument versus what is conflict. I'd like to suggest this. It's where there is a strong, probably mainly relational disagreement or breakdown. It could be over values. It could be over interests. It could be over relationships. It could be over pretty much anything. But it results in two people being in disharmony with one another, or maybe more than two people, a number of people. But, you know, there are other forms of conflict. Some of us have self-conflict. There's a conflict going on in our hearts and lives of beating ourselves up over something. Can I say God wants to speak into that too today? If that's you, I believe this. I felt God just stir that in my heart as I was preparing. God wants you to learn that you can love yourself and your story as well as him.
There's conflict in the supernatural realm. Scriptures talk about a battle going on in the heavenly realm. We are all involved in a battle, basically, to see God's kingdom come in a world where Satan has had free reign to a large degree.

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[5:15] There's also conflicts in the world today. And, you know, as I was preparing for this, just watching the news over the last few weeks, it's like, wow. There are so, so many conflicts going on in the world today.

It's important we pray for peace in our world. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be children of God, called children of God. Actually, just while talking about prayer, can I just mention, you may have seen these booklets on your seat when you sat down, or they may be under your seat, or somewhere.
They should be on every other seat in the auditorium. Rooted and fruitful, autumn 2025. We're going to be having three days of prayer and fasting as a church. And we would love you to be brought in on that, get involved in that in every way you can.
This is like a guide to those three days. It starts a week on Tuesday, the 30th of September, Wednesday, the 1st of October, Thursday, 2nd of October, the information's in the booklet.
Can I encourage you, have a read. There is a digital version of that booklet, which will be sent out this week as well. If you prefer a digital version, that's absolutely fine. There are four particular gatherings we're going to be having as a church, where we'll be gathering to pray.
[6:28] But you'll find in this booklet, there are areas to consider and pray about each day. And so I hope this will be a really helpful tool for all of us to be involved as we pray and seek God, as we fast together, as we look for God's intervention in our lives, individually, corporate, and in this world, which he's placed us in.

I'll move on to the second question. Oops. That was the advert. Sorry. Three days of prayer and fasting, 30th of September, 2nd of October. Okay.
What do we mean by conflict? Second question. Is conflict always wrong? See, I grew up with a model which said conflict fundamentally was wrong. And that wasn't out of any religious background, particularly.
That was just how my parents were. How do I suggest to you that Jesus experiences and even causes conflict in the scriptures?
And therefore, I don't think it can always be wrong. Otherwise, why would he have done it? They may say, well, what sort of conflict? Well, he had to manage conflict between the disciples over who's greatest and things like that.
[7:43] He went into the temple courts and turned over the tables. In fact, he really caused conflict with the Sadducees and Pharisees throughout those three years of his ministry because they hated him.

Is it always wrong? I would suggest no. Disagreements can be really helpful. In fact, if we're to help one another be disciples of Jesus and to grow as disciples of Jesus, I would suggest to you that some form of conflict is really important because we need to be able to challenge one another.
We need to actually be able to say, hey, what do you mean by that? Are you sure that's what God wants? We need to challenge one another through scripture. Now, of course, how we do that is a different matter and we'll come on to that in a moment and I want to highlight the fact there's a fine line between healthy conflict and unhealthy conflict.
Unhealthy conflict can be fueled by all sorts of things, but anger, sinful behavior and things like that and we'll come on to exploring a couple of passages about that in a moment.
And then the third thing I want to sort of, these are just foundational comments as we start, is can we see the world's common models of conflict are broken? In other words, can we decide and settle this now in our hearts, actually, I don't just want to copy what I see the world doing, what I see my friends doing, what I see on TV, what I see in the news, what I see on social media.
[9:17] I want to have a biblical view of conflict. I want to be equipped, Lord, to be healthy in that. And of course, you know, all those things I've just mentioned, TV shows, shouting anger, all these sorts of things, they're fundamentally driven by pride, by a desire to put oneself first and it results in lots of people getting very damaged.

I just want to say if that's you here today, you've experienced terrible conflict which has had a massive impact in your life. Jesus wants to come and meet you and bring healing to you and freedom from the effects of that over your life that you can be free to live for him and all that he's calling you to.
So let's turn to scripture and we're going to dive into both Ephesians chapter 4 and James chapter 1. It will come up on the screen but if you want to turn in your Bibles, please do. Ephesians chapter

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4 verses 20-27 said this, you, however, did not come to know Christ that way.
Surely you heard of him and were taught in him according to the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self which has been corrupted by deceitful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on the new self created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.
Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour for we are all members of one body. In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you're still angry and do not give the devil a foothold.
[11:03] And then in James 1 we read this, my dear brothers, take note of this. I love how he says, take note of this. He's really wanting to emphasise this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

So I'm just going to get a drink. So I'd like to suggest to you four things which we can learn from the scriptures which help us to have a healthy view of conflict.
The first is this, have a healthy mindset. Out of the mind so much flows. Have a healthy mindset. You may want to ask yourself the question, how do I see conflict?
What beliefs, values, fears are at the heart of how I see it and how I deal with it in my life? In other words, what's the driver? What's going on behind the scene?
Ephesians 4, 22, 24, we just read all about the shedding the old. corrupted by evil desires. Wow. Taking up the new.
[12:20] We may need to do that. We may need to go, oh, I'm aware that actually, my view's always been about winning arguments. Nothing more than that. Winning's been far more important than anything else.

We may need to resolve some things from the past. I've already suggested this. Hurt, pain, anger, get rid of bitterness, anger, etc.
We need to deal with that. Sorry, I'm referring to it a bit further on in that passage in Ephesians 4. It talks about get rid of bitterness, anger, all those things. We may need to learn to have a mindset which says, I'll bear with one another.
I'll forgive one another. Colossians 3.13 encourages us to do that. That means resolving grievances. It means we don't just bury stuff and go, well, I'll forget it.
Or I may even get to the point where I go, oh, I'll forgive and forget it. But sometimes we need to resolve things, not just forgive or forget. So what is our mindset?
[13:28] Let's think about having a healthy, mindset. I think for me the fundamental question is this, in my behaviour and in my life, who am I loving more? Me?

Others? God? Simple as that. Who am I loving more? What others think about me?
What I feel about myself? Who God calls me to be? Who God's made me to be? The grace of God in my life? My fear, my pain, my hurt, my anger, my angst, my experiences?
What's going to define me? Who am I loving most? And by the way, can I just say this because I've heard people comment on this before. Well, you've got to look after yourself. You've got to defend yourself.
I'm not sure we do. Right the way back in Exodus 15, we read, the Lord is my defence. I remember being taught this many, many years ago listening to a now famous Christian leader in our nation and he was going through a tough time where people were accusing him of things and he said, I'm not going to defend myself.
[14:49] God's my defence. God will justify me. I don't need to justify myself. Now, people can say that in a way of manipulation and control.

It wasn't said in that way. Please don't hear that. But it was a statement of faith. My trust is in God. My eyes are on God. I'm not going to worry what others are going to say about me.
I'm just going to pursue him. It shaped me. That was 35 years ago. I remember watching this person going through this particular set of circumstances. 35 years ago I started to learn, oh, don't try and defend yourself, Andrew.
Don't always manage it but I try. First step, let's have a healthy mindset about conflict. Second one, value others.
It sort of follows on. I've sort of moved into it already a bit. Let's value others. enough to listen well. Let's value others enough to be prepared to address things when they need to be addressed.

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[15:53] To call things out. To, as we've read in Ephesians 4, learning to speak the truth in love. It's not just learning to speak the truth, it's learning to speak the truth in love.

It's not about trying to get one over on somebody. It's not about trying to win an argument. It's about the person's best, not mine. I love a person so much I'm prepared to call them out on something and yet I'm going to do it in a way which helps them to get closer to Jesus and to grow in their relationship with God.
It's not about me, it's about them. Can I suggest being real with one another, something which we are terrible at in the UK and we can learn from many other cultures but it's actually essential if we're to be in unity together, dwelling in unity together.
We do need to be real with one another. We do need to find ways in which we can call things out. It's something to actually value, that we value one another and as we value one another therefore we're prepared to make an investment into our relationships with one another.
How do we do that? Well, we start with knowing that we're loved by God.
[17:19] We're we're His but He's in control that we can trust Him.

We allow Him to make us secure in Him that that's where we find our security. It's where we find our identity. It's that I am loved by God. I'm cherished by Him.
Why do I need to go and find that anywhere else? I'm loved with the perfect love of God. Not just any old love, the perfect love of God.
with the perfect love of God. I'd like to suggest to us that it's difficult to love others well if we don't know first of all the love of Christ.
And when we are struggling to love others well we need to go back to God. Oh, I first start with the love of God. Let that flood into our hearts, into our lives such that from that we can then love others well.
[18:31] let's allow His love, Christ's love to define us and therefore our relationships with each other.

Third one. Resolve things well as soon as you can. Where there is conflict, conflict will happen, conflict can be good. Effectively, don't go to bed angry which is the instructions we read in a few verses in Ephesians 4.
Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Matthew 5, 24, 26 encourages us be reconciled with God and each other.
Seems they go together. Peter and Barnabas who we started, sorry, Paul and Barnabas who we started talking about here do resolve their issues.
You can read about it in Colossians 4 or 2 Timothy 4. They work that through eventually. It may take a bit of time sometimes. But if we value our relationship with one another then we need to value reconciliation with one another.
[19:45] Not just patching something up and sort of well we'll just ignore that that happened but working it through. Being real. Loving one another enough that we care enough to actually engage not just run away or hide it.

So it starts with our reconciliation with God through Christ through his death on the cross and in a little bit we're going to come and celebrate communion together.
1 Corinthians 11 reminds us that actually if you've got a problem with one of your brothers or sisters and you're coming to take communion hey you need to resolve that. I wonder whether that is something we need to think about today.
Do we take that seriously? Have we come in good relationship with God and with each other into this time where we're going to break bread together in a bit? Or are there things which we need to go ah?
Now practically you may not be able to go and resolve that now but you can make a resolution in your heart and your mind that I will go and get that resolved as soon as I can after this.
[20:58] But if actually there's a challenge there where I'm sort of standing here and thinking I don't want to resolve that. I think you need to see and understand that that letter 1 Corinthians addresses that in a way where we've got to go hang on I need to take this seriously.

I do need to go away and sort this. I want to be dwelling in good relationship with my brothers and my sisters in Christ. I want to read a word somebody bought a couple of weeks ago.
It was Chris Paris. You here Chris? I can't see you. Oh there you are. Hello. 24th of August Chris brought this word.

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He said when we're walking sometimes we can get a stone in our shoe. We can do a couple of things. We can shuffle off it around to try and move the stone or stop and take the shoe off and deal with the stone. If you leave the stone in your shoe it will affect the way you walk.
Most of us probably have done this haven't we? Try and push it to the end of the shoe or whatever it is. I've learned over the years this is Chris saying this I've learned over the years it's vital to deal with stones.
[22:21] I'm not just talking about walking but talking about life and the way in which we live. We need to stop and recognise sinful attitudes and pride. Just recently I've been thinking about funerals where there's been conflict between family members and they no longer speak to each other.

Perhaps someone says something to another which calls defence. It started as a small stone but it affected relationships and they no longer want to communicate or be involved with the family.
A person doesn't want to do that. God is saying stop today and deal with that stone. You may not have been here on the 24th of August or it may not have registered with you.
I want to bring it back and say hey let's deal with the stones. He goes on. He said I know it's going to be tough. As we heard this morning Shadrach Meshach and Abednego had to face the furnace but God was standing with them.
The release that we get when we know that God is standing with us, holding us as we remove that stone is fantastic. God will never leave you or desert you.
[23:34] You will know him standing by you. Acknowledge the stone. Stop. Do something about it. Chris. Thank you Chris for bringing that word to us.

I think for some of us we perhaps still need to hear it. And we certainly need to learn it as a life lesson. Because funnily enough it's not just once you pick up a stone in your shoe, you do it many times in your life.
And we can fall out with people many times in our lives. Are we going to pick it out? Are we going to deal with it? Resolve things. Final point. Be generous.
Be generous with each other. In Harvest Church we define generosity as seeing the best, seeking the best and sharing of our best. Let's do that with each other throughout our lives and also the world around us.
Let's take God's generous love that we have received and let's share it with others through being radically different about how we live. Radically different.
[24:43] Not easily taking offense. Both forgiving and apologizing. Valuing relationships. Not carrying grudges or hurt which then shapes and defines the present.

Ultimately let's demonstrate the good news of the kingdom of God that most of us in this room have come under. The good news of the gospel through how we live, how we do life together.
Including healthy conflict. I think at this point I would love us just to pause and reflect for a moment. And you may want to say something like this. God would you come and help me to see anything which I need to address here. It can be a really simple prayer. It's up to you how you do it.
But obviously if you are going to pray that, know that God will speak. You mainly also need to pray, God give me grace to respond well. so let's be quiet for a moment or two.
[25:56] Amen. Help us Lord.

Help us Lord to develop healthy models of conflict in our lives.
To do it well. To display something of your magnificence to the world around us because of how we do these things.
Help us Lord where we have been hurt and damaged in the past and where we need to forgive and move on to do just that.
Help us to let go of things which have been done to us which we've allowed to define us.
Fundamentally Lord help us to know more of your love more of your grace more of your mercy more of your good news that it will affect and shape our lives and how we live our lives out for the glory and honour of your name.
[28:10] In Jesus' most precious name we ask it. Amen? Amen. We're going to come back into worship I think. Thank you. And then we're going to break bread together.

Just to say if you've got any questions there's a number up on the screen or an email address up on the screen if you want to ask questions about this preacher or anything else you're very welcome to take a photo of it and get in touch with us please.

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Thank you very much. Can I ask you again if you're able and willing to stand with us? Thank you. Thank you.

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